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ABSTRACT

This booklet offers general guidelines and recommendations on how to develop and exercise the interpersonal skills required of a successful school principal. Attention is devoted to the basic principles of effective communication and personal interaction, with emphasis on the principal's relations with students, teachers, and members of the community. (JG)

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THE PRINCIPAL AND HUMAN RELATIONS

1972

Division of Human Relations
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

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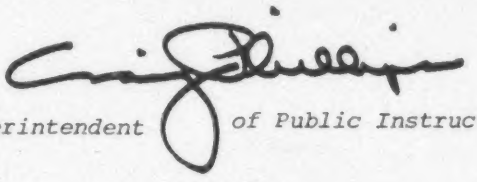
FOREWORD

Consolidation, desegregation, and curriculum revision are a few of the changes that have characterized the nation's schools in recent years. The most significant challenges administrators have had to meet have been changes in the students themselves. Administrators who have been successful have adapted themselves so that they can meet these changes.

The public school principal especially finds it necessary to make adjustments in his own thinking in order to best serve this "new" student. He has to rely more than ever on good human relations.

The purpose of this booklet is to focus on some of the areas in which the principal must assume more dynamic leadership. The areas represent but a small part of the total responsibility. The good principal will discover that each problem he solves may reveal several other unresolved problems. Such is the nature of public school administration today.



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The role of the principal in human relations requires someone who is highly skilled, well trained, and experienced. He must be many things to many people. The success or failure of his school program depends largely upon his ability to relate to his community, faculty, and student body and to exact from them such reactions as are assets to the growth and development of youth.

The purpose of the first section of this booklet is to emphasize some of the more essential qualities which the principal must develop as he guides the school program toward the goal of meeting the needs of its membership.

Alertness

The principal should keep himself regularly informed of the activities taking place in the school. It is especially important that he be prepared to answer questions which might arise from persons outside the school regarding school activities. It is generally not very impressive to hear a principal say too often that he does not know or to have him refer to other members of the school staff to answer a question regarding school activities. It is desirable to delegate responsibility and authority, but the final responsibility still rests, legally and functionally, with the principal.

Communicative Skills

It is essential that the principal have adequate communicative skills to be able to understand and make himself understood by a wide variety of personalities. He must be able to get the

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attention of his listener and the eye of his reader. His expression must be simple and direct, yet diplomatic so as not to be offensive to the sensitivities of his patrons.

Listening is a very meaningful part of the communicative process. The good leader must develop the patience to listen attentively. He must realize that if an individual perceives that he has a problem, he does in fact have a problem and is at least in need of a sympathetic listener. Much can be learned simply by listening to the experiences of others.

Objectivity

One of the most difficult tasks facing the administrator of any school is that of making objective decisions. It is the nature of man to think and act in a manner directed by his cultural base. He tends to relate new situations to his past experiences and react accordingly. For this reason, there are usually many intervening variables which determine the course of action one will take, some of which may not be relevant to the current situation.

It is especially important that a principal, in working with disagreements which may arise between teachers, pupils and teachers, among pupils, or between any of these groups remain completely objective in forming a decision. He must be careful not to let prejudices or personal likes and dislikes influence his actions. Pupils and teachers alike will have more respect for the principal who reaches objective decisions.

Self-Control

If one expects to lead others, he should first master the art of self-control.

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Pupils, teachers, and parents do not express themselves freely to the ill-tempered principal. Moreover, he is not as likely to win the support of the community. Enough resentment may be built up to cause children to be half-hearted or even alienated from the school and its program.

It is desirable that the principal display a calm, deliberate manner, especially when dealing with difficulties.

Open-Mindedness

The change-oriented school needs to have as its leader a change-oriented principal. In our school as in our society, we have many institutions designed to solve problems which no longer exist. Often, the administrator is too involved in the ongoing process to see the need for change.

The principal who is known to be open to suggestions is more likely to receive constructive program evaluation from teachers and students. To assure this end, he must provide for intercommunication among students, staff members, parents, and administrators regarding the proceedings of the school.

He must encourage others to present their suggestions and criticism of the way the school is organized and conducted. Finally, he must evaluate all the suggestions he receives, giving due attention to their applicability to the school program. Those which hold potential for fostering constructive change should be brought into the school program.

Sense of Humor

The ideal principal has the kind of personality which people feel comfortable with. This is

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not necessarily an inherent characteristic; one can develop it if he is willing to work at it. In developing such a personality, two factors stand out as imperatives: approachability and stability.

There are people who find it extremely difficult to talk to people whom they regard as authorities. The principal must be the authority of the school which he leads and yet must be able to make people feel at ease when talking with him.

A keen sense of humor is a tremendous asset for the principal in that it may provide a relief from the formality of personal contact or break the monotony of a long, taxing conference or meeting. More important, though, is the fact that a sense of humor signals to the public, as well as the student body and staff, that the principal is approachable.

It is equally important that the principal be stable and predictable in his disposition. It is extremely degrading to a teacher to have her principal speak harshly to her because he is experiencing irritation from some source not related to her. The effective principal must separate his school and professional problems from his personal ones. Teachers need to feel that he will place their problems ahead of his own and will consider their needs as urgent at all times.

Gaining the Confidence and Support of Staff Members

To gain the confidence and support of staff members, the principal must give the same to them. If they preceive him as not being worthy of their support and confidence, they will withdraw it from him and he will find himself woefully inadequate to provide a strong school program. There are no set rules for winning people in education any more than in any other field of endeavor. There are some tried methods which have been beneficial to other

administrators.

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The most effective principals seem to be those who encourage teachers and staff to offer suggestions toward the improvement of the school program. People will usually work harder to make a system work if they were involved in devising that system.

Principals should find time to confer with staff members on matters of personal and professional interest to them. He will certainly not have the solutions to their personal problems and often may not even be qualified to advise them on the matter which may be presenting a problem. Nevertheless, they need to feel that he is genuinely interested and that he is considerate enough to make reasonable exceptions for the teacher who is in need of special consideration.

Teachers often have to take positions that may not be popular with the general public. This is especially true with respect to discipline and homework. The teacher needs to have the solid support of the administrator in these areas. His attitude toward these matters should be a matter of record available for ready reference. The teacher should know that, as long as she acts within the policy spelled out in this reference, she will receive the support of the principal against any opposition.

The range of personal temperaments on a school staff may vary from the extremely timid to the arrogant personality. Either of these extremes will experience considerable difficulty in direct contact with the principal unless he is aware of this fact and provides an atmosphere where these people feel at home. The timid teacher needs to be made to feel a part of the school lest she withdraws completely. The domineering person must be guided into putting his forcefulness to good constructive use. He may be given the duty of organizing and supervising

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student discipline committees, safety patrols, bus parking, visitor automotive traffic, or any of a long list of duties for which firmness is an asset. This gives him a sense of fulfillment without too great a compromise of his basic nature.

It is wise for the principal to evaluate regularly the work of each of his staff members, and to share his impressions of their progress with them. He must realize that most people know the kind of job they are doing and as he, the principal, evaluates their performance, they, in turn, are evaluating him as an administrator. If his tendency is to grossly over-rate people, they perceive him as naive; if he tends to under-rate people, they perceive him being unfair, biased, and dishonest. It is therefore important that he explains to faculty and staff members his honest evaluation of their work.

In addition to these practices, the principal should take advantage of every opportunity to represent the interest of his staff in a favorable light, especially to the higher administration. Since few teachers ever get a personal audience with the superintendent, they must rely on their principal to express their needs and desires to the central office. Here again, the image which the central office has of a teacher will tell the teacher, at least from her point of view, better than anything else whether her principal has her interest at heart.

These are but a few suggestions for gaining the support of the staff. As the principal works for better relations with his staff, he will discover many approaches which will fit his situation.

Winning Respect and Approval of Students

It is a well-known fact that the surest way to

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command respect is to show respect for others. This is especially true for school administrators in their dealings with their students. Genuine respect must be mutual and reciprocal. It is usually the result of interaction with the group rather than the result of tradition, policy, or rulings dictated to the pupil.

There are many things a principal may do to increase the probability that he will have the respect and approval of students. The first of these is to realize that students have the right to instruction and example which will allow them to develop their capacity to the fullest for appreciation and performance and are entitled to the development and extension of activities which are satisfying and fulfilling to meet the needs of increased leisure time. The acceptance of this principle will cause the principal to regard the student as a citizen of the school with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities pertaining thereto.

The principal should maintain personal contacts with students as far as possible. He should attend student activities and involve himself as actively as he can in matters of student welfare. He should encourage students to make suggestions, seek counsel, or present requests. He should act fairly and justly, yet firmly with students, making clear what he expects of them and why he expects it. Above all, he should commend youth on worthy efforts and encourage them to continue to strive toward higher goals.

Enlisting Community Support and Cooperation

Many communities, particularly in rural eastern North Carolina, center their whole sphere of activities around the school or church. Too often, strife develops between these two crucial institutions as they follow individual plans headed to-

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ward the same goal--the wholesome development of boys and girls into men and women. The skillful principal will find ways to incorporate into the school program some of the values held in high esteem by local citizens.

He must establish personal acquaintances through friendly, informal contacts. He should collaborate with other community leaders on school and civic matters. He must adapt his speech and manner to a mode that can be readily understood by the members of the society in which he works.

Laymen are usually eager to lend a hand in school activities if asked to do so. The effective principal will extend invitations to lay citizens to serve on planning committees, act as teacher helpers, and to sometimes act as relief for the teacher during short periods when a teacher must be away, such as to attend a funeral. This involvement on the part of the patrons generates interest in the school program.

The community must be kept informed of what the school is doing. Students and faculty should be urged to tell their families and friends what the school is doing whenever they have the opportunity to do so. The school should be in close contact with the local news media so as to keep its program constantly before the public. This way, evaluation becomes more likely to be a joint effort of community, staff, and student body.

Summary and Conclusions

In viewing the broad area of human relations in the public school, the principal must expect to interact with three basic groups; they are students, teachers, and the community. Each of these groups may view the educational program from a different perspective and may react to it accordingly.

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The principal must assume the role of coordinator of these three factions in such a way that the end result of their interactivity is a progressive school program.